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Paul Turner Sargent

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# Paul Sargent's letter to Dario a week before Paul's death Jan. 30, 1946

Paul Sargent

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**Paul Sargent's letter to Dario a week before Paul's death  
Jan. 30, 1946**

**Dear Dario,**

**Well, I read in the paper that all Am. Troops would be out of France and Belgium by March, I believe. You have the news too by this time—if it is reliable.**

**The bump of the winter is about passed. One can notice that the days are definitely longer now. We have had great variations in temperature this winter. Yesterday and today temperature up to new 40 degrees. Tonight the wind is blowing from the northwest and 10degrees above zero predicted for in the morning. It has been like that most of the winter.**

**Before Christmas we had a big snow as I guess I told you; 12 in. of it on the level. A four inch snow since with scraps of both still with us. With the big snow it was very cold so I did not get any snow pictures. The cold would not have kept me from painting if I had found anything exciting to paint. Here at home I saw nothing new and roads were just about impassable for several days so I could not get over to the creek. Also the weather was so cold that the water in te creek was frozen solid and covered with snow so no chance for pictures. I have been out twice for the snow, once when the big one was disappearing, and water showing.**

**But I have been thinking in terms of snow while indoors. Have been making some composition sketches of things I have had in mind for years. Years ago, aobut (30) I made an 20X26 sketch of a rail fence in snow looking down the rail fence to a hill and also toward the sun. The sketch (it comes closer to being a study) still looks good to me and I could not improve on it much now. Since I made it I have had in mind making a large one from it with two hunters, one has just climbed over the fence on the near side, the other is still on the other side. I have a scheme for making the studies of the figures and not freeze. I'll let you in on the secret? On a bright day when it is warmer, but before the green of spring comes, I'll pose the figures with proper lighting, then have several white bed sheets spread on the ground around figure to give reflection on face as does snow. The second figure**

**will show only head and shoulders and will get reflected light from snow on his side of fence. So to get that, a sheet stretched upright before model will give the same effect. These are wrinkles I thought out myself. You see, before green comes out the reflection from objects, sky, etc. are the same as winter, and the sheets take the place of cold snow. Also, if one wishes to paint a small bush or tree with sleet on it just cover the tree with cellophane on each twig and branch and you have exactly the same effect as if sleet was there. Of course one can't drape the whole landscape.**

**I am glad you are getting some art work done. It will all count up to that practice one has to be behind them. In working on portraits in color about the only advice I can give you is very general. In a room with the average color on the walls the shadows you know comes from the walls, the color of the lights from out of doors, the sky, so are cool whether it is sunlight or gray day. This is assuming that it is a north light, any sunlight coming in makes it a different problem.**

**The portrait resolves itself into three general colors and values (north light). The cool light from sky makes the cool highlights on forehead, then there is the big warm gray greenish shadow, or shadows. Between the shadows and the cool lights are the half tones which partake of both the cool highlights and the warm shadows, the half tones are between in color and value. Not so warm as the shadows, not so cool as the lights.**

**The most color on face will be on the cheek just below the cheek bone or just to the front of it, depending on the lighting. I am assuming that the pose of the head is about three-quarters, either way,  $\frac{3}{4}$  shadow  $\frac{1}{4}$  light, or the opposite.**

**So the color contrast is a spot of pink on the cheek surrounded by and emphasized by a gray green shadow. The shadows are not very green, you can get them with blue, burnt sienna, and yellow ochre. The color of the neck if it shows (in light) will be yellowish.**

**Paint the eye sockets, the big shadow from eyebrow to cheek with the same gray green of the shadow of the face except that the eye sockets are warmer and darker, and here is where more the burnt sienna is handy. Don't pay any attention to**

**the eye itself until the socket is right. John Singer Sargent said to drop the eyes into the socket as you would drop an egg into a saucer. In most cases I think it is easier to paint the eye dark then put in the whites into that than to do whites and darks separately.**

**I should have started at the beginning. Here is the way I do portraits but is not the way I was taught in art school. I learned it from Miss Marie Goth of Ind. Who learned it at the art students' League in N.Y. where she went to school. Her teacher is Dumond. It is as follows.**

**Block in the head with the lines (painted). No features.**

**Separate hair and face.**

**Mix a color of light cadmium red and yellow ochre that is middle between values of face, light rather than dark but darker than highlights on forehead and cheek. Keep it warm, and not too thick. Into this paint the big shadow on face, and eye sockets the big ones first. This plan works best with most of face in light. If  $\frac{3}{4}$  in shadow I would paint the  $\frac{1}{4}$  light of face this way and mix shadow separately in order to keep shadow clean and not much white in it.**

**It does not make so much difference how one does it—the result is what counts but some ways are easier than others. As you work you will find your own way.**

**In general in any kind of painting keep the picture simple. When you get stuck in most cases you will find you haven't held to this law of simplicity. I heard a teacher of Illustration at Art Inst. Say that when one used more than five values in a picture it was getting complicated.**

**In most landscapes the law is warm color up front, cooler ones farther away. An exception to this is the sunset effect. Yet one can't force the warm sunset only so far or it won't stay back. Always one must search for the complementary colors that make colors stand out. There are not always glaring effect but they are there. If you see some brilliant colors you will find the complement not far away.**

**I have two books on painting. One a biography of John S. Sargent. The other is on technique and materials by Ralph Mayer. The last seems to have about all the information one**

**needs. I thought I had read about everything in paints but I found a new one in this book. Certain colors when mixed as powder with oil take up more oil than others, the lighter fluffier pigments take most oil to get to a paintable consistency. White lead takes little oil, zinc white a great deal, and all the others have their own place. Mayer says that in painting one should avoid using a high oil color in the lower layers of the picture.**

**I am beginning to see that if one paints according to Hoyle he will hesitate at every brush full. But, I'll try to abide by a few of the rules. As I look over my old pictures, some are cracked and peeling, yet some of the oldest (30 ys.) are just as fresh as when first painted—and I know nothing whatever of ways and process that plague me now.**

**Well, you will be getting back before long and we can talk a great deal, I hope.**

**I sent a Florida sunset picture size 3 ft. X 4 ft to the Hoosier show. One only. It got in but no prize that I have heard about. I consider it one of the best I ever made. But I believe I told you about it.**

**Sincerely,  
Paul**